

The Lived Experience of Gay Male Students at a Catholic Institution

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Abstract

This qualitative research looks into the lived experiences of gay male students at a Catholic higher education institution. The experience of these students has traditionally not been analyzed, and this study takes a close look at what it means to be gay and attend a Catholic university. These students have experienced varying degrees of acceptance and support from their peers, faculty, staff and the institution as a whole. While acknowledging that the institution does provide some supports, students found them to be uncoordinated, insufficient, and not of value, when compared to supports offered to students who identify with other minority groups. These students provided their own insights on what they are looking for in terms of support from the institution as a whole. Students' recommendations formed the basis of implications for improved practices to increase notions of acceptance and support for this student population.

Purpose

- To gain an understanding of how gay male students at a Catholic institution perceive acceptance and support
- How this population perceives both support from the institution as well as peers
- Understand current climate for this student population to inform best practices

Research Questions

- How supported and accepted do gay male students feel on a Catholic campus?
- How has experiences with peers influenced these perceptions of acceptance and support?
- How has their experience with the institution, administration, faculty and staff influenced these perceptions ?

Methods

- Qualitative research study
- Utilized the snowball method to locate research participants.
- Hour long structured interviews
- Interviews transcribed & coded
- Themes emerged from the data

Participants

- 3 current undergraduate students
- 1 current graduate student
- 2 recent alumni (graduated in past 2 years)
- All participants self-identify as both male and gay

Implications

- Greater diversity in supports available for LGBTQ students
- Outreach and education about LGBTQ students across campus
- Development of a peer mentor program
- Increased visibility of LGBTQ students & available supports
- Public support of gay students from administration

Future Research

- How the gay male student population engages with rest of LGBTQ community
- Research into barriers for students coming out
- Benchmarking supports offered at other Catholic Institutions

Selected References

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Findings

- Students felt supported by their peers for the most part
- Students surrounded self with supportive peers
- Institutional support was lacking in quality and diversity of services
- Faculty and staff were supportive; however many students were unsure of how to connect with supportive faculty and staff
- Even students that were out to the campus displayed levels of fear and discomfort with disclosing orientation to new people
- Catholic identity of institution informed view of what supports could be offered

